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SUBJECT: BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER ON GOB COUNTERNARCOTICSS
EFFORTS

11. (SBU) Summary: Taking the opportunity of remarks before the assembled Rangoon diplomatic corps on New Year's Eve, the Burmese Foreign Minister digressed for ten minutes from his set speech to make very reasoned comments on the GOB's desire to prove the credibility of its efforts against narcotrafficking. Although he is not seen as a heavyweight in terms of power, he is known as being close to Senior General Than Shwe, reportedly because he never brings unpleasant news to the Senior General and always "follows instructions". Therefore, the FonMin's message about the GOB's commitment to counternarcotics efforts can be judged as having come from the top and is a surprising change from the GOB's usual tactic of "deny, deny, counter-accuse". End Summary.

12. (U) Taking the opportunity of a remarks before the assembled Rangoon diplomatic corps at noon on New Year's Eve, the Burmese Foreign Minister digressed for ten minutes from his set speech to comment on the GOB's desire to prove the credibility of its efforts against narcotrafficking. Although some of the FonMin's stated goals may be unattainable (i.e. reducing opium production in 2003 to 80 per cent of the 2002 production), he sent a strong message that he would do everything in his power as Vice Chairman of the CCDAC (Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control) to maintain momentum in the GOB's counternarcotics program.

13. (U) He also called for regional assistance and cooperation with China, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia and India in combating ATS production, particularly with regards to controlling the flow of precursor chemicals. The FonMin steered clear of the usual GOB tactic of claiming that Burma was the subject of a conspiracy or a smear campaign in regard to its counternarcotics efforts, saying instead that he was "ashamed" to see his country named in the international press as a major source of drugs.

14. (U) The FonMin also called the situation of the farmers who are participating in opium substitution projects "tragic". He said that the GOB knew it was the farmers that suffered the most and assured the audience that the GOB was sending additional food assistance to them to keep them from going back into opium production. He said that the GOB was not asking for foreign assistance, but that direct foreign assistance to the farmers would be welcome. He also mentioned the GOB's agreement with the Wa in which the Wa pledged to be out of opium production by 2005, saying "pledges were no longer enough", there had to be action and concrete proof that they were getting out of narcotrafficking

15. (U) At the luncheon after the speech, the FonMin continued to talk about how intent the GOB and he, personally, was, to rid the country of opium production and of the importance of aiding farmers in crop substitution projects. He asked the COM if the USG would provide assistance with crop yield surveys and satellite imaging to assist in eradication efforts (hopefully an indication that the next CNC survey will not be thrown off track by the probable of non-certification of Burma's counternarcotics efforts).

16. (SBU) Comment: The FonMin has a reputation for being non-controversial and it was highly uncharacteristic of him to digress from the standard "roads, bridges and visits" speech to speak extemporaneously about the GOB's narcotics problem. Although he is not seen as a heavyweight in terms of power, he is known as being close to Than Shwe, reportedly because he never brings unpleasant news to the Senior General and always "follows instructions". Therefore, the FonMin's message about the GOB's commitment to counternarcotics efforts can be judged as having come from the top and is a surprising change from the GOB's usual tactic of "deny, deny, counter-accuse". End Comment.
Martinez